

## **DBQ 8: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS**

### Historical Context

No time in U.S. history has seen greater efforts to reform society than the four decades preceding the Civil War. During those years, a variety of social problems came under attack. Many thousands of Americans worked tirelessly to establish public schooling, reform the criminal justice system, improve care of the infirm and mentally ill, promote women's rights, and battle poverty and drunkenness. By the 1840s and 1850s, abolitionism, the attempt to end slavery, had become the greatest of these antebellum reform movements. (*Antebellum* literally means "before the war." In U.S. history, it marks the decades before the Civil War.) There was, it seemed, an almost frantic effort during the antebellum years to perfect America and its people, to right wrongs and eradicate evils. Mark Hopkins, the president of Williams College, confidently predicted that this huge effort to reform society would soon result in the destruction of "wars, and intemperance, and licentiousness, and fraud, and slavery, and all oppression through the transforming influence of Christianity."

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–6). As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view. Be sure to

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

**Question:** What forces or ideas motivated and inspired this effort to remake and reform American society during the antebellum years?



**DBQ 8: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS, CONTINUED****PART  
A**

The following documents address some of the ideas proposed by reformers in the years before the Civil War. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

**Document 1**

This excerpt is from a statement made by President-elect Andrew Jackson in 1828. (Quoted from *Freedom's Ferment*, by Alice Felt Tyler, University of Minnesota Press, 1944, p. 22.)

I believe man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

According to this statement by Jackson, what was the ultimate purpose of "elevating our people, [and] perfecting our institutions"? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was this so important in the 1820s and 1830s? \_\_\_\_\_

**Document 2**

William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator* in 1831, only two years before founding the U.S. Anti-Slavery Society. Garrison quickly became the most prominent and uncompromising abolitionist in America. The following excerpts come from the first issue of *The Liberator*, in which he publicly vowed to oppose slavery until slavery's "chains are burst . . . SO HELP ME GOD!" He begins by explaining why he decided to establish his abolitionist newspaper in Boston.

I determined . . . to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, *within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty*. Assenting to the "self evident truth" maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights—among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement [right to vote] of the slave population.

What factors were primary motivations for Garrison in establishing *The Liberator* in Boston? \_\_\_\_\_

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**DBQ 8: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS, CONTINUED****Document 3**

Francis Grund was a German nobleman who traveled in the United States during the 1830s. Here he describes what he saw as the origin of the antebellum reform spirit.

Religion has been the basis of the most important American settlements; religion kept their little community together—religion assisted them in their revolutionary struggle; it was religion to which they appealed in defending their liberties. It is with the solemnities of religion that the declaration of independence is yet annually read to the people from the pulpit . . . and it is religion which assists them in all their national undertakings. The Americans look upon religion as a promoter of civil and political liberty.

What, according to Grund, was the inspiration behind Americans' "civil and political" reforms? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Document 4**

The most prominent educational reformer of the antebellum years was Horace Mann of Massachusetts. From 1837 to 1848, Mann directed the Massachusetts Board of Education; in this role, he became a tireless promoter of public education. The following excerpt comes from his *Eighth Annual Report to the State Board of Education*, issued in 1844.

If we do not prepare children to become good citizens—if we do not develop their capacities, if we do not enrich their minds with knowledge, imbue their hearts with the love of truth and duty, and a reverence for all things sacred and holy, then our republic must go down to destruction, as others have gone before it.

According to Mann, what was the purpose for public schooling reforms? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does this document compare with Document 1? \_\_\_\_\_

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**DBQ 8: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS, *CONTINUED*****Document 5**

Theodore Parker, a Massachusetts Unitarian minister, was a leading abolitionist. He was also active in a number of other antebellum reforms, including the peace movement. This is an excerpt from a sermon given in 1847 during America's war with Mexico.

War is an utter violation of Christianity. . . . If war be right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. Every man who understands Christianity knows that war is wrong.

What, according to this document, inspired Parker's opposition to the Mexican War and his wider involvement in world peace efforts? \_\_\_\_\_

**Document 6**

The "Declaration of Sentiments" was issued by the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848. A number of abolitionists and women's rights advocates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Frederick Douglass, met in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, a small upstate town. Their goal was to "discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights" of U.S. women. Here is an excerpt from the "Declaration of Sentiments," a statement of grievances.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government.

What ideas are suggested here as motives behind the women's rights movement of the antebellum period? \_\_\_\_\_

**PART  
B**

What forces or ideas motivated and inspired this effort to remake and reform American society during the antebellum years?



## HOW ARE ANSWERS SCORED? A SCORING RUBRIC

Here is a scoring rubric that identifies the recommended criteria used in grading DBQ essay answers. You might want to try to grade some of your own answers, or answers written by classmates. And, you might ask your teacher to duplicate one or two of the best answers in your class so that everyone can see examples of good DBQ essays.

5	Strong thesis – responds directly to the question Uses documents completely and accurately; weighs the importance and validity of evidence Cites considerable relevant information from outside learning Displays a thorough understanding of the topic and related issues Well structured, well written; proper spelling, grammar, mechanics
4	Thesis stated – answers the question Uses documents correctly; recognizes that all evidence is not equally valid Cites some relevant information from outside learning Shows an understanding of the topic and related issues Clearly written and coherent; some minor errors in writing
3	Addresses the question but has weak structure and focus Uses most documents correctly – simplistic analysis; does not always weigh the importance and validity of evidence Includes little relevant information from outside learning Shows basic, though simplistic, understanding of the topic and related issues Weaker organization; some errors in writing detract from essay's meaning
2	Poor focus; fails to answer the question adequately Some documents used correctly; some only paraphrased or misunderstood; fails to recognize any difference in the validity of evidence Includes little information from outside learning – what is included is irrelevant. Shows little understanding of the topic and related issues Poorly organized; many errors in standard English
1	Fails to address the question; confusing and unfocused Fails to use documents correctly; simply paraphrased or misunderstood Includes no relevant information from beyond the documents Shows almost no understanding of the topic or related issues Disorganized; littered with errors in standard English
0	No thesis; no attempt to address the question Ignores or misuses the documents Includes no information from beyond the documents Shows no understanding of the topic or related issues Lacks any organization; little attempt made; blank paper